



TOWN OF ARLINGTON
MASSACHUSETTS
GAS LEAKS TASK FORCE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is Arlington asking National Grid to do?

The Select Board's resolution was drafted by the Town Manager's Gas Leaks Task Force. This specialized group reviewed data provided by National Grid about the leaks in their natural gas delivery system. For this resolution, the Task Force narrowed in on 14 of the worst leaks. Arlington is calling on National Grid to repair those 14 leaks before June 30, 2023.

What will happen next?

National Grid has 30 days to respond. When the Town of Waltham issued a similar resolution, National Grid acted quickly and mobilized to make repairs. The Gas Leaks Task Force hopes for a similar result in Arlington. Unfortunately, after the initial repairs were made, major leaks in Waltham persisted. The Gas Leaks Task Force plans to evaluate and monitor repairs to ensure lasting fixes are put in place. The Task Force also plans to engage in public outreach and education to alert the public when major leaks are found.

Why are gas leaks a problem?

The natural gas infrastructure in Massachusetts is highly leak prone. There are hundreds of leaks in Arlington. Other municipalities are similarly impacted.

Gas leaks pose a risk to public health and safety. Leaked gas can accumulate in underground spaces, such as electric and sewer structures and manholes. When gas accumulates, it can ignite, causing fires and explosions, as happened in the Merrimack Valley.

Despite marketing to the contrary, natural gas is methane, a fossil fuel that is neither clean nor sustainable. Methane contributes to climate change. It is a greenhouse gas that is 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide. If you think of carbon dioxide as being one blanket trapping heat in our atmosphere, think of methane gas as being 80 blankets trapping that heat.

Gas leaks kill trees. Leaked gas infiltrates the soil around tree roots, suffocating the tree. Arlington's tree warden has sought and received payment from National Grid for street tree deaths caused by leaked gas.

Arlington residents pay for the leaked gas that National Grid emits. The leaked gas is calculated into the costs on your utility bill. Leaked gas costs ratepayers in the Boston region an estimated \$90 million per year.

Am I safe?

State law requires that utility companies categorize leaks according to the risks they pose. Grade 1 is the most dangerous and poses immediate threat of explosion. There are no Grade 1 leaks in Arlington. Grade 2 leaks are not immediately hazardous but could become hazardous soon. There are five Grade 2 leaks in town. Grade 3 leaks are non-hazardous and are expected to remain so. Arlington has 151 Grade 3 leaks.

What is the Gas Leaks Task Force?

The Town Manager's Gas Leaks Task Force was formed in 2016. The group's initial purpose was to work with the Town Tree Warden and the Town Tree Committee to evaluate the impact of gas leaks on our street trees. That effort resulted in purchasing new equipment for measuring gas leaks, documenting the impact of gas leaks on street trees, and seeking repayment for lost trees. This work is now integrated into the Tree Warden's responsibilities.

The Task Force is now charged with implementing a priority measure under the Town's Net Zero Action Plan, as below.

Engage in advocacy to encourage regulators and utilities to greatly accelerate the repair of gas leaks, and to phase-out the natural gas distribution supply network.

The Task Force works with municipal, regional, and nonprofit partners to accomplish this goal. The Task Force consists of the assistant town engineer, the tree warden, representatives from the Tree Committee, a representative from Sustainable Arlington, and community volunteers from Mothers Out Front.